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First name	Scott
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I am making this submission as	Resident
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Submission type	Personal
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Organisation making the submission (if applicable)	
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Your position in the organisation (if applicable)	
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Consent to make submission public	Public
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Your story	<p>We live in Conjola Park and were present on the last day of 2019. Our experiences and the experiences of the residents of Yatte Yattah, Little Forest, Conjola and Conjola Park were real and actual. What we witnessed during and after the fire is why we are writing this.</p> <p>We have many questions like why the National Parks (NPWS) and the NSW RFS were allowed to burn off the afternoon before a predicted catastrophic day causing 120+ homes to be destroyed and tragically 3 people killed. We still do not understand while Little Forest was being impacted by fire at 10am, numerous groups of fire engines were still heading south past the little forest turn off on their way to protect towns to the south, like Batemans Bay. The residents of Little Forest were fighting for their lives at this time. The only resources sent to us at Conjola Park were for Fire and Rescue NSW trucks. We understand that the NSW Rural Fire Service is responsible for allocating/ responding resources to the bushfires. What</p>
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concerns us most is that having lit a fire, the RFS didn't allocate resources to the area impacted by their fire. The whole community is outraged by the disregard shown to us by the state authorities in our time of need.

The following is a timeline of events on the 31st December 2019.

10.00 am – fire impacts on Little Forest

10.30 am – unextinguished RFS/NPWS burn at Martins Ridge Rd flares up due to strong, hot and dry north-westerly winds

11.00 am – 4 Fire and Rescue NSW fire engines arrive and take up position on the corner of Valley Dr and Kurrajong Cres. All remaining residents at this time were wetting down their houses and their neighbours properties and making other preparations before the fire impacted.

11.30 am – fire impacts Lakeside Dr, Conjola Park. Fire and Rescue NSW trucks reposition to Lakeside Dr.

12.00 noon – by this time residents who were trying to leave Conjola Park were unable to escape as both roads east and west were blocked. The Lake Conjola end had a large fallen tree over the road that made the road impassable. The highway end was on fire and blocked by police. We were trapped. The majority of residents received no warning via mobile phone. The Fire and Rescue trucks returned to Kurrajong Cres/Valley Dr intersection.

12.20 pm (approx.) – fire impacts Coolibah Ave Conjola Park.

12.30 pm – the town water supply ceased to operate due to unknown circumstances. Still unknown over 3 months later. This issue caused great panic as residents in the fire zone were left defenceless. That panic and the lack of management at the exits and in the area could've caused more injuries as the fleeing residents and tourists narrowly avoided collisions more by luck than anything else. Buckets of water previously filled were our only source of water for firefighting.

12.30 pm -2.30 pm – both fire fronts, the one from Martins Ridge Rd and the other one from Little Forest Rd impacted on all of Conjola Park. At this stage there was less than 1 hectare of safe ground for the remaining residents. Nor-westerly wind changes to strong southerly wind causing further damage. After this residents sheltering on or near the lake start to return to their homes to check on the state of the destruction.

5.00 pm – the remaining Fire and Rescue trucks that were working in Conjola Park were then re-tasked to somewhere else? At this time Conjola Park was left defenceless until the following day.

1st January 2020

8.00 pm – A NSW RFS truck arrived in Coolibah Ave and spent 20 minutes putting water on a mulch pile. After they left, the mulch pile smouldered for another 2 and a half days until the mulch had completely burned.

Between 5 pm on the 31st December and 8.00 pm on the 1st January 2020 the village was still on fire and properties still under threat. It was only the local residents who banded together to stop many more homes burning to the ground. As it was, 3 homes that were untouched during the 2 fire fronts that impacted the village were later lost due to no fire protection being provided. During this time, locals continued to put themselves in further danger with the clearing of access roads, lanes, driveways etc. They were removing dangerous trees and trying to make areas safe all while the fire was still burning around them.

With these efforts from the survivors came the conditions that required medical attention. Heavy smoke inhalation, cuts, burns etc. Throw in fatigue and mental trauma and you'll know our needs were great.

Yet, none of the services/agencies tasked with providing that aid were present. They weren't present for well over a week. The people remaining chose to stay as their homes were under threat for another 4 days. There was also the issue of looters gaining access to the village through the very same roadblocks that locals were unable to get through. Leaving was not an option. Late on the 1st January police road blocks were set up at Lake

Conjola Entrance Rd. The Police at the roadblock were very heavy handed to the local people, threatening arrests and not allowing them back into the suburb with essential supplies ie, food, water and generators or fuel for the generators. These same police allowed the media to come and go as they pleased. Those media organisations harassed distraught residents whose homes were destroyed. Instead of prioritising trained medical personnel and possible trauma counsellors, the community were instead faced with microphones and cameras. In most cases, that trauma was escalated with the news crews trying to get grieving home owners crying on their news broadcasts.

We have never seen people treated as disgracefully as the survivors were. Having been there that day and facing what we faced, we have no problem classing this as a horrific emergency situation. We also believe that there was no emergency management especially post event assisting the community move into to the recovery phase.


The failure of that management could have been mitigated with a small amount of planning. The fire that impacted on Conjola Park and surrounding villages was the result of a horrific decision by the people in charge of the incident. However, this was part of a month long incident on the south coast. Surely, planning for the aftermath of this long running incident should've already been considered/carried out. All it would've taken after the fire was a couple of doctors/nurses/paramedics and trauma counsellors to arrive even on New Year's Day to tend to the local community. As this incident had been running for so long, we are astounded that these people weren't on standby in the first place. Also, at least the presence of at least one patrolling fire engine to give residents comfort, reassurance and information. The police should've used the heavy handed tactics that they used on the locals, on the media. The Media shouldn't have been given access until medical/mental services were provided to our community.

Looking at that now, it doesn't appear to be a very tough ask. But, apparently it was too difficult or too uncaring for anything to be organised for these areas. These people pay Fire Levies, rates and taxes the same as everyone else but, they don't appear to warrant the same protection and care as everyone else.

The local residents are all aware of how our community was left to rot after the fire. The residents were left to their own devices to defend and protect life and property. There is a great sense of disappointment within the community with the response received prior, during and after the fire. This has impacted our community heavily with feelings of neglect from those that are there to assist in times of need. The mental health and wellbeing of individuals within the community has had and will continue to have a massive impact on many members within this local area.

These events have happened before and will continue to happen due to the fact that the tactics and planning of the NSWRFs are never questioned. They appear to be above scrutiny as the majority of their workforce is volunteer. The highly paid leaders of the NSWRFs are never held to account on the decisions they make. In this instance for Conjola Park and surrounding villages, 120+ homes destroyed and 3 lives lost. Someone must be responsible for this disgrace and must be held accountable. If not, these situations will continue to happen and the lives of NSW residents be treated with contempt.

Scott and Kristina Brennan



1.1 Causes and contributing factors

**1.2 Preparation and
planning**

**1.3 Response to
bushfires**

1.4 Any other matters

Upload files
